

# Supporting Breastfeeding in our Community: A Toolkit for Action



A project of the Ohio Breastfeeding Alliance

[www.ohiobreastfeedingalliance.org](http://www.ohiobreastfeedingalliance.org)

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## **Introduction**

In 2005, Ohio's State Legislature passed a law to protect breastfeeding in public, ostensibly giving families freedom from harassment in caring for their infants in public settings. This law directly resulted from an increased value of breastfeeding by families, healthcare professionals and the community as contributing to the health and welfare of our children, and a desire to promote breastfeeding in Ohio.

Today, with breastfeeding initiation rates moving over 75% of mothers and babies beginning to breastfeed at birth, obstacles remain which cause that rate to drop sharply by the time a baby is six months old, to less than 20% of those who began breastfeeding. Laws and policies that protect and support breastfeeding become essential in helping families understand that their community values breastfeeding as much as they do, and wants to help them continue to maximize the health and well-being of their children. This is the goal of supporting parents who breastfeed their babies in public settings, including your facility.

We encourage you to use this resource as a way to understand the importance of community support of breastfeeding, and to find concrete ways to promote the acceptance of breastfeeding within your facility. We hope you find answers to your questions in this toolkit, as well as positive actions you can incorporate into the operation of your establishment that will benefit both your business and your community as well as breastfeeding families.

Please feel free to contact the Ohio Breastfeeding Alliance with any questions you may have at [info@ohiobreastfeedingalliance.org](mailto:info@ohiobreastfeedingalliance.org).

**A Checklist for Becoming Breastfeeding Friendly:**

- ✓ Information: Appreciate the importance of breastfeeding for public health and community well-being. Put forward a policy about how your facility will offer breastfeeding support.
- ✓ Training: Bring information to those who staff your facility. Give your staff tools to be able to communicate the policy effectively and handle any misunderstandings or concerns appropriately.
- ✓ Signage and Space: Positive, appropriate signage supports the education and training you began. Creating spaces that allow breastfeeding and/or pumping comfortably supports a positive experience in your facility.
- ✓ Resolution: Have solutions ready to support the needs of breastfeeding families and customers or clients affected by breastfeeding situations. Proactive tools can support positive resolutions and reactions to your organization and staff.



## Step 1: Information

**What You Should Know:** Breastfeeding is more than just another lifestyle choice. It's an important health choice for mothers and babies. That's why so many organizations and agencies that care about health have created policies to support breastfeeding.

The World Health Organization recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months as the optimal way of feeding infants. Once complementary foods are added, they suggest breastfeeding may continue up to two years of age or beyond. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding with no supplements for the first six months and advises that breastfeeding continue for a minimum of 12 months or as long as is mutually desired.

Communities are an important part of public health success. You and your business are an important link to breastfeeding support and success in your community.

**Tip:** Understanding the importance of breastfeeding helps you and your staff understand its value to your community. This means you and your staff can empathize with the breastfeeding goals of your visitors, customers, and clients.

**Tip:** You can use the attached information to help your staff and yourself understand the importance of breastfeeding to your community.

Important points to know (From the Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding Fact Sheet, 2011):

How many American women breastfeed their babies?

- Three out of four mothers (75%) in the U.S. start out breastfeeding, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2010 Breastfeeding Report Card.
- At the end of six months, breastfeeding rates fall to 43%, and only 13% of babies are exclusively breastfed.
- Among African-American babies, the rates are significantly lower, 58% start out breastfeeding, and 28% breastfeed at six months, with 8% exclusively breastfed at six months.
- The Healthy People 2020 objectives for breastfeeding are: 82% ever breastfed, 61% at 6 months, and 34% at 1 year.

What are the health benefits of breastfeeding?

- Breastfeeding protects babies from infections and illnesses that include diarrhea, ear infections and pneumonia.
- Breastfed babies are less likely to develop asthma.
- Children who are breastfed for six months are less likely to become obese.
- Breastfeeding also reduces the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- Mothers who breastfeed have a decreased risk of breast and ovarian cancers.

What are the economic benefits of breastfeeding?

- Families who follow optimal breastfeeding practices can save between \$1,200 and \$1,500 in expenditures on infant formula in the first year alone.
- A study published [in 2010] in the journal Pediatrics estimated that if 90% of U.S. families followed guidelines to breastfeed exclusively for six months, the U.S. would annually save \$13 billion from reduced medical and other costs.

- For both employers and employees, better infant health means fewer health insurance claims, less employee time off to care for sick children, and higher productivity.
- Mutual of Omaha found that health care costs for newborns are three times lower for babies whose mothers participate in the company's employee maternity and lactation program.

What obstacles do mothers encounter when they attempt to breastfeed?

- Lack of experience or understanding among family members of how best to support mothers and babies.
- Not enough opportunities to communicate with other breastfeeding mothers.
- Lack of up-to-date instruction and information from health care professionals.
- Hospital practices that make it hard to get started with successful breastfeeding.
- Lack of accommodation to breastfeed or express milk at the workplace.

What can the health care community do?

- More hospitals can incorporate the recommendations of UNICEF/WHO's Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative.
- Provide breastfeeding education for health clinicians who care for women and children.
- Ensure access to International Board Certified Lactation Consultants.

What can employers do?

- Start and maintain high-quality lactation support programs for employees.
- Provide clean places for mothers to breastfeed.
- Work toward establishing paid maternity leave for employed mothers.

What can community leaders do?

- Strengthen programs that provide mother-to-mother support and peer counseling.
- Use community organizations to promote and support breastfeeding.

What can families and friends of mothers do?

- Give mothers the support and encouragement they need to breastfeed.
- Take advantage of programs to educate fathers and grandmothers about breastfeeding.

What can policymakers do?

- Support small nonprofit organizations that promote breastfeeding in African-American communities.
- Support compliance with the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes.
- Increase funding of high-quality research on breastfeeding.
- Support better tracking of breastfeeding rates as well as factors that affect breastfeeding. (<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/calls/breastfeeding/factsheet.html>)

How Communities Can Help: The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding

([https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/pdf/actionguides/Communities\\_in\\_Action.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/pdf/actionguides/Communities_in_Action.pdf))

## Step 2: Training

**What you should know:** As an operator or staff of a place of public accommodation, Ohio's law protecting breastfeeding applies to your facility and your staff. While over 75% of Ohio mothers start breastfeeding, by six months, fewer than half are still breastfeeding. Public support of breastfeeding is an important part of helping mothers continue to breastfeed. Many mothers feel nervous about breastfeeding in public or are afraid of being harassed. When businesses make positive efforts to support and accommodate breastfeeding, in compliance with the law, breastfeeding families are more inclined to patronize those businesses and facilities.

Our society isn't used to public breastfeeding, which just over a hundred years ago was a common sight. Many wonder why mothers can't use a bottle while out in public, but this imposes a burden on the mother that can also bring an early end to breastfeeding altogether. Breastfeeding a baby isn't a profane or lurid act, but rather a normal function of caring for a baby. Breastfeeding doesn't need to be hidden away, rather our community should recognize and support families who are doing the best for the health and well-being of our children. Supporting breastfeeding is a way of valuing and supporting the welfare of society's children, and their families' attentive care.

Most babies breastfeed without those nearby even knowing what is happening, and certainly a breastfeeding baby is quiet! If a patron is uncomfortable with another patron breastfeeding nearby, you or your staff can assist both by explaining the law and offering to reseal the uncomfortable patron.

**Tip:** If you have an employee handbook, include a policy on breastfeeding patrons, how to treat them, and how to resolve concerns.

**Tip:** Use our video and materials to help staff understand why and how to offer support for breastfeeding families.

**Tip:** Creating a positive impression of your business is the ultimate goal of supporting breastfeeding and complying with the state law. Talking to your staff about breastfeeding taking place in your facility prepares everyone to know how to react to mothers and babies in your space. Becoming breastfeeding-friendly is an opportunity for you to increase your reach and business.

**Tip:** As staff changes, it's important to remember to include training about breastfeeding in their orientation. Continued training is the most important element in ensuring compliance with the law and supporting breastfeeding in your community.

Suggestions:

"Boiler-plate" scripts can help staff get off to a good start while they adapt to new ways of thinking and treating clients and customers. Some starters:

If a family member asks about a space to breastfeed: "You are welcome to breastfeed anywhere in our facility/establishment. If you would like a private space, you can use our nursing room which is located (where)."

If staff notices breastfeeding going on: "Can I get you a glass of water?" Or, simply smile, nod positively, and move on.

If another customer complains about breastfeeding: "Our facility/establishment follows the state law allowing a mother to breastfeed wherever she is allowed to be. Can I help you find another table/seat?"

If a customer or client tries to engage staff in a discussion about the policy supporting breastfeeding: "Our facility follows the state law protecting public breastfeeding." Refrain from offering

your own opinion, positive or negative, about breastfeeding in public, or how a breastfeeding mother is conducting herself. Repeat the policy and redirect the conversation.

**Tip:** Although it may be instinctive, there is no need to apologize for the breastfeeding parent offending the complainer. Simply move right on to explaining that the policy is to follow state law and support breastfeeding, and suggest how you can help the complainer in a different way. Apologizing may increase the complainer's feeling that something should be done about the breastfeeding. Recognize that apologizing for breastfeeding is similar to apologizing for your clients' disabilities or for having children; it's something beyond your control and which you do not regulate without discriminating.



### Step 3: Signage and Spaces

**What you should know:** Signs welcoming breastfeeding and designating special areas for privacy give a public face to your policy on breastfeeding. They serve to remind staff and patrons that breastfeeding is welcome in your facility. Signs are one of the easiest ways to help everyone be on the same page about breastfeeding families.

**Tip:** Create spaces in the public areas of your facility that allow some privacy and ease for care of children. This can include: designated diaper changing areas in bathrooms, a private space for breastfeeding, seating that faces away from the main seating area, areas with more space for baby seats or diaper bags.

**Tip:** Post our handout on how staff can create a breastfeeding-friendly environment as a reminder of the shared training.

Tip: You can find free signs that you can print out and post online at <http://kellymom.com/blog-post/breastfeeding-welcome-here/> or you can “google” for images of the international breastfeeding symbol.



#### **Step 4: Resolution**

**What you should know:** Despite your best efforts, incidents can still happen. Attitudes about breastfeeding are still changing. That flux can sometimes come out in public. Being prepared, and preparing your staff, to deal with poor attitudes about breastfeeding, helps your business head off larger problems with your community. Talking to your staff about public relations, communication skills, and how to effectively interact with patrons, will help your business come out on the positive side of any potential incidents.

**Tip:** Decide in advance what you are willing to offer patrons who are upset about public breastfeeding. Our recommendation would be to not offer any special discounts or accommodations, as your patrons should expect breastfeeding in a breastfeeding-friendly business. Treat them with courtesy, but show them that their expectations that the breastfeeding mother should be treated as the one causing the problem is not the attitude of your business. Educate your staff about what their alternatives are when dealing with an upset client who wants you to violate your breastfeeding policy.

**Tip:** Some business owners have shown their support to a harassed breastfeeding mother and family by giving them special treatment, including discounts or gifts. Gratitude for your visible support is a strong incentive to the public to support your establishment.

**Tip:** Sometimes, rarely, you may not even be aware that an incident took place in your facility until you hear about it in the media. Breastfeeding families who are upset about an incident may choose several approaches to communicating their displeasure. Some do use social media to communicate their unhappiness, or they may encourage a “nurse-in,” where many nursing parents gather to protest the incident. If you have a social media presence, you can engage the posters to offer your input that you are a breastfeeding friendly establishment, and welcome the opportunity to explain your policy and resolve the issue. Establishments that have taken the approach to engage and work for resolution have found the outcome to be positive for their business.

**Tip:** If you need any information or support for working towards resolving a breastfeeding in public incident, you can contact Ohio Breastfeeding Alliance at [info@ohiobreastfeedingalliance.org](mailto:info@ohiobreastfeedingalliance.org), or your local breastfeeding coalition.